

The relationship of the Guinea-Fowls  
*Agelastes meleagrides* Bonaparte and *Phasidus niger* Cassin

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In West Africa and the Congo two monotypic genera of guinea fowl are recognised: these are *Agelastes meleagrides*, the White-breasted or Turkey-like Guinea-fowl of forests from Liberia to Ghana, and *Phasidus niger*, the Black Guinea-fowl of the Congo forest from the Cameroons to Ituri.

In structure and size the two birds are remarkably alike differing most notably from other guinea-fowl of *Numida* and *Guttera* in the texture of the plumage and the length and shape of the tail. From the few field notes available both seem to have similar habits, being denizens of thick forest, very shy, and keeping in small flocks or family parties rather than large flocks like other guinea-fowl.

The differences on which the two genera have been recognised lie in the colour and pattern, and in the extent or lack of feathering on the head and neck.

The adults of *Agelastes* have the head and upper neck bare except for a few sparse white feathers on the neck and throat, and the bare skin is recorded as rose-red in life: the lower neck and breast are white and the remainder of the body plumage slate grey with fine vermiculations. In *Phasidus* there is a band of short, soft black feathers from the nostrils to the hind crown, the sparse feathering of the throat and neck is black and slightly more prolific on the hind neck than in *Agelastes*: the bare skin is recorded by Bannerman as yellow in life, and by Chapin as light red to pinkish grey on the throat: the plumage is uniform dark, sooty brown, with obsolescent vermiculations.

These differences alone seem small grounds for distinguishing two genera and furthermore are not so pronounced in the young. An immature specimen examined of *Agelastes* has the sparse feathering of the head and neck black with a greater concentration of feathers on the crown following the line of the band in *Phasidus*, while younger birds are described as having the white of the lower neck and breast replaced by blackish-brown feathers with no vermiculations, but with the rest of the plumage more like that of the adult.

It seems indeed that the two birds, far from being members of different genera, may be closely related. Mr. R. E. Moreau, who has examined specimens with me, agrees with this view, and when I consulted Dr. J. P. Chapin he replied (*in litt*). "I can readily agree that *Agelastes* and *Phasidus* are geographic representatives of one line of the guinea-fowl family and might be included under a single generic name."

I therefore propose that *Phasidus* be considered a synonym of *Agelastes* and that the Black Guinea-fowl shall be known as *Agelastes niger*.

References:

- Bannerman, D. A. 1930. *Birds of Tropical West Africa*, 1: 356-358.  
Chapin J. P. 1932. *Birds of the Belgian Congo* 1: 657-660.

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